

# **Publish or perish: exploring the barriers and enablers within the context of DBA programmes.**

Stream: Scholarly Practice

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## **Abstract**

The paper examines the rhetoric of publish or perish with a particular focus on Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) education. We explore the growth of DBA education and how it is talked about (or not talked about) in the published literature. We differentiate the DBA from the PhD and draw attention to the promised potential of DBA education; rigorous and relevant management research which impacts on management practice. We situate ourselves as insider-researchers who are passionate about this promised potential and disappointed at the dearth of published empirical papers produced by and for the DBA community. This paper contributes by re-focusing attention on social practice theory. Specifically, we draw attention to the conceptual richness within communities of practice and academic literacies theory. At the conference we will offer some initial insights into our early data generation interventions and our planned interventions. In presenting this paper it is our intention to connect with those who are equally passionate about the hidden impact of DBA education and those who want to support the DBA community to publish. We refuse to perish!

**Keywords:** Doctorate of Business Administration, Insider-Research, Management Education, Management Practice, Academic Literacies, Communities of Practice.

## **Introduction**

This paper reports on an on-going research project and is an early outcome of a collaborative 'insider-research' project. Like many insider-research projects (Trowler, 2014) our collaboration commenced with a series of conversations which surfaced our concerns regarding the publication and wider dissemination of doctoral work. We are both experienced supervisors and examiners of PhD and Doctoral of

Business Administration (DBA) students. We have both successfully published with students and supported students to publish individually and with others. However, despite this success we are concerned by an apparent lack of DBA publications within our community.

We specifically focus on students who are studying for the DBA degree as differentiated from the PhD (Graf, 2016). The DBA is undertaken on a part-time basis by individuals who are likely to be more mature, experienced workers, probably in senior organisational positions or are self-employed as management consultants. Occasionally, these individuals are engaged as academic faculty, although this is less common than for their PhD counterparts. Nevertheless, the DBA carries equal academic rigour to that of the PhD (AMBA, 2015) and its aim is to imbue students with advanced investigative skills, the ability to generate new knowledge and carry their intellectual curiosity into organisations in order to have both an intellectual and practical impact (Diamond et al., 2014). The differential suitability of the DBA versus PhD in the typical sense is discussed by Stoten (2016) who claims that the PhD is the 'premier' qualification for entering academia, where the DBA makes a contribution to work-based learning.

In a rapidly changing knowledge economy, the relevance of a PhD is being increasingly questioned (Banerjee & Morley, 2013). The provision of the DBA is, therefore, more aligned to the knowledge development and real-world needs of managers and organisations. Given that there is evidence to suggest that research which is written up in management journals and the business press has more impact in organisations than that produced in business schools (Forster, 2007; Geuens, 2011), there has been little evidence of PhD students writing for impact in organisations. However, the DBA degree is specifically designed to have impact at organisational or societal level, therefore, peer reviewed publication of evidence-based applied research has the potential for a more rigorous and relevant influence. Seen from the student's point of view, whilst it is typical for PhDs to publish in peer-reviewed academic journals, reflecting their embeddedness in the academic world, the outputs from DBAs are less prolific. And for organisations, the impact of having access to academic outputs written by individuals who understand the practitioner world could be vital for achieving competitive advantage and being at the vanguard of changes to policy, strategy and operational innovation.

Releasing the promised potential of DBA education; rigorous and relevant management research which impacts on management practice, was the 'concern' (Trowler, 2012) which brought us together and created the catalyst for our research project. Our intention is to explore the perceived barriers and enablers to the publication of DBA scholarly practice research. Our aim is to enhance our scholarly practice research community and at the conference we offer some initial insights into our early data generation interventions and our planned interventions. This paper contributes by re-focusing attention on social practice theory. Specifically, we draw

attention to the conceptual richness within communities of practice theory and academic literacies literature.

### **Insider Research**

Insider research is a common feature of many DBA programmes and can be understood as: 'research by complete members of organizational systems and communities in and on their own organisations': (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007:59). Insider research can also be undertaken as collaboration between insiders and outsiders (N. Adler, Shani, & Styhre, 2004; Bartunek & Louis, 1996).

We situate ourselves as insider-researchers and during our early conversations we surfaced a common goal, to encourage and support DBA students and alumni to publish. We also noted differences in our approaches. Programme A includes an option for students to publish a reflexive account of practice as an alternative to a reflexive chapter in the DBA thesis. Programme B includes an option for students to produce three publishable papers as an alternative to the traditional monograph design. To date only a handful of students in both institutions have taken the publication option. While some students in both institutions, have successfully published in peer-reviewed journals, the majority have not; despite expressing an interest in publication opportunities.

A central concern for insider researchers is role duality, an addition to the organizational membership role. This can lead to role conflict, loyalty tugs and identification dilemmas. Several researchers have explored the ethical dilemmas which emerge when organizational members provide information 'in confidence' (Holian & Coghlan, 2013; Milano, Lawless, & Eades, 2015). An additional research role adds a complex dimension to an organizational role and enacting two roles can affect the relationship with other organizational members (P. A. Adler & Adler, 1987). This includes the dilemma of writing a report of what they found and dealing with the aftermath of superiors and colleagues, or doctoring the report to keep their job (Nielson & Repstad, 1993). This dilemma is magnified when the written report is published within the public domain.

However, 'insiderness' is not a fixed value and the researcher may be investigating aspects of the institution previously unknown to them, collecting data from strangers (Trowler, 2012). What counts as 'inside' also depends on one's own identity positioning, how one sees oneself in relation to the research settings. This highlights the transitional state of DBA researchers who occupy a place of duality between the practitioner and academic worlds. Their apprenticeship into 'Engaged Scholarship' (Van de Ven, 2007; Van de Ven & Johnson, 2006) bridges a number of liminal periods, being betwixt and between two states, (Tempest & Starkey, 2004) where they develop firstly to interchange between the identity of practitioner and the identity of researcher, before they begin to blend these personas into an interrelated entity. In some senses, therefore, the task of publishing is more difficult as it is not just about thinking and writing in an academic field, but is about occupying two stances and articulating these in outputs which seek to influence individuals, organisations, policy or society.

Therefore a central concern for insider-researchers is how ‘complete members may undertake academic research in their own organizations while retaining the choice of remaining a member within a desired career path when the research is complete’: (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007:59); to remain employed and employable. The context for this research is DBA programmes it is therefore useful to explore what has been published about this particular form of insider research.

### **DBA Education: who’s talking about it?**

To situate our work we began with a search of the Scopus data base in April 2017. This data base is the world's largest abstract and citation database of peer reviewed literature. It is important for scholars in many countries for career development and grant application purposes, <https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus>. In addition, Scopus is used by our students, so the literature accessed from this site influences their research practice. We are not claiming that this is a systematic review of all literature, but it does provide a useful context to situate our argument. A search on “Doctorate of Business Administration” revealed only four document results. We widening the search and the term “Professional Doctorates” revealed some interesting trends in the published literature.

### **Professional Doctorates: what’s being talked about**

A search for “Professional Doctorates” resulted in 204 document results with the first document being published in 1960. It is noteworthy that only 25 papers were published between 1960 and 2000. Since 2000 the topic of Professional Doctorates has received sustained interest with a total of 179 documents being published between 2001 and 2017; five so far in 2017 (Scopus accessed 19-4-17).

<b>Year</b>	<b>Documents</b>
2017	5
2016	17
2015	15
2014	15
2013	14
2012	12
2011	9
2010	12
2009	12
2008	12
2007	10
2006	11
2005	13
2004	7

2003	6
2002	4
2001	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>179</b>

**Table1: Number of documents published on “Professional Doctorate” since 2001 - present: Scopus April 2017**

Further analytics reveals where the work has been published, with the journal Studies in High Education publishing the most articles, 17 of the 204 documents. This is followed by the journal Higher Education Skills and Work Based Learning, which published seven of the 204 documents.

Source	Documents
Studies In Higher Education	17
Higher Education Skills And Work Based Learning	7
Nurse Education Today	5
Studies In Continuing Education	5
Innovations In Education And Teaching International	4
Journal Of Nursing Management	4

**Table 2: Main sources publishing documents on “Professional Doctorate” since 2001 - present: Scopus April 2017**

One indicator of the influence of an article (within an academic publishing world) are the citations received. Studies in Higher Education (SHE) published four out of the five most cited articles. The exception was the article by Neumann (2005) who published in the Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management.

Authors	Year	Title	Cited by
Bourner T., Bowden R., Laing S.	2001	Professional Doctorates in England	69
Neumann R.	2005	Doctoral differences: Professional doctorates and PhDs compared	44
Maxwell T.	2003	From first to second generation professional doctorate	38
Wellington J., Sikes P.	2006	'A doctorate in a tight compartment': Why do students choose a professional doctorate and what impact does it have on their personal and professional lives?	34
Lester S.	2004	Conceptualizing the practitioner doctorate	31

**Table 3: Top five cited papers on “Professional Doctorate” since 2001 - present: Scopus April 2017**

Bourner et al. (2001) is the most cited paper with 68 citations. They identify 20 distinctive features that are common to the professional doctorates and argue that together, these features could reasonably be said to comprise 'professional doctorateness'; at least as it is interpreted in English universities.

A notable feature of the most cited papers appears to be PhD envy, or if being kinder a need to distinguish the Professional Doctorate from the more established PhD. Neumann (2005) discusses the continued growth and diversification of professional doctorates within the Australia context. She remarks on the similarities and differences found between PhD and professional doctorate programs and discusses three specific areas: one, recruitment and selection of students, student choice of professional doctorates and perceived career benefits; two, the structure and organisation of PhD and professional doctorate programs, including the identification of the research topic and three, the perceived status of professional doctorates vis-à-vis the PhD. She concludes that the issue of differentiation between the doctorates (within the context of Australian higher education) could become the capacity to pay.

Australia also provides the context for Maxwell's (2003) highly cited paper. He provides evidence on the growth of professional doctorates and discusses the emergence of a second generation of professional doctorates. Lester (2004) situates his work in an UK and Australian context and also signals the emergence of second-generation doctorates. He uses the term practitioner doctorates with research arising from development projects and resulting in substantial organizational or professional change; a significant contribution to practice. He concludes that second generation doctorates can be conceptualized in a way that is both robust academically and represents a high level of adequacy for the complex and far-reaching problems encountered in contemporary society.

It is interesting that four of the five top cited papers speak from an academic perspective, inside the academy. It is refreshing therefore that Wellington & Sikes (2006) give voice to the students as they explore why students choose a professional doctorate and what impact this has on personal and professional lives. Their conclusion that there is a variety and diversity of doctoral students following the 'professional' route is perhaps unsurprising. However, they highlight future implications for the curriculum, the pedagogy and the assessment of professional doctorates.

The topic of Professional Doctorates continues to receive attention in the peer-reviewed literature. There is some evidence of a growing maturity in the field and an emerging confidence in the contribution Professional Doctorates. The DBA community have developed a presence with the UFHRD community and the scholarly practice stream continues to attract good quality papers. We have seen the emergence of edited books (Anderson, Gold, Stewart, & Thorpe, 2015; Collins & McBain, in press) and dedicated symposium for DBA students, for example the joint Chartered Association of Business Schools (CABS) and the British Academy of Management (BAM) DBA symposium which will be held in May 2017 at Henley

Business School. However, our experience has been that students (and academic colleagues) often struggle to further develop these conference papers. This is at the centre of the problematic we seek to research: what are the barriers and enablers to publication within our DBA community.

In summary, the debate regarding the similarities and differences between DBAs and PhDs is likely to continue for some time. As a DBA community we can continue this 'PhD envy' or we can build our own community and let the evidence emerge. However, we cannot be naïve and we need to demonstrate that the DBA is at Doctoral level. The Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK has issued guidelines on Doctoral Degree Characteristics (QAA, 2011). They do not differentiate between PhDs and DBAs and the guidelines include the statement that:

Doctoral degrees are awarded to students who have demonstrated:

the creation and interpretation of new knowledge, through original research or other advanced scholarship, of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline, and merit publication. (QAA 2011: 32)

We argue that releasing the promised potential of DBA education requires support for students to publish and a community who can peer-review this work. The UFHRD community provides a useful forum to progress this agenda.

### **The DBA as a community of practice**

The concept of 'communities of practice' provides a conceptual lens to examine this problematic. The term, community of practice, is often attributed to Lave and Wenger (1991) and has focused our attention on situated learning, arguing that learning is fundamentally a social process. Situated learning involves engagement in communities of practice and participation in these communities becomes the fundamental process of learning. The concept has become influential in education, management and social sciences and remains a fruitful concept for research. This is evidenced by an April 2017 Scopus search which resulted in 7,074 document results, 173 documents being published in 2017.

Situated learning theory views learning as an 'integral and inseparable aspect of social practice': (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 31). Learning viewed as situated activity has as its central defining characteristic, a process Lave and Wenger (1991) call legitimate peripheral participation. Lave and Wenger (1991: 29) argue that legitimate peripheral participation:

provides a way to speak about the relations between newcomers and old-timers, and about the activities, identities, artifacts, and communities of knowledge and practice. It concerns the process by which newcomers become part of a community of practice.

Legitimate peripheral participation provides a useful analytical tool for understanding learning and raises questions about the 'community' which is the focus of the participation. How might we conceptualise the DBA community?

Brown and Duguid (1991) conceptualised organisations as ‘communities of communities’ and argued that: ‘to understand the way information is constructed and travels within an organisation, it is first necessary to understand the different communities that are formed within it and the distribution of power among them’ (Brown and Duguid, 1991: 55). Descriptions of how the shape and membership of these communities fluctuates and is continuously being formed and reformed, identify the community as the centre of knowledge sharing, moving the primary focus of knowledge away from the organisation and the individual to the workgroup. In describing these communities, they highlight the difference between ‘canonical’ groups, officially endorsed by the organisation, and ‘noncanonical’ communities which are being continuously formed and reformed. They caution that a focus on ‘canonical’ groups can conceal the influential communities where work and learning is actually organized and accomplished. They claim that learning requires access to and membership of the ‘target community-of-practice’ and advocate that attempts to strip away context should be examined with caution.

This cautionary note is supported by Lave and Wenger (1991) who highlight two consequences of overlooking the importance of legitimate participation in the target practice: first, learners’ identity becomes an explicit object of change and secondly, in the absence of a field of mature practice ‘exchange value replaces the use value of increasing participation’. They discuss test taking in schools and state: ‘Test taking then becomes a new parasitic practice, the goal of which is to increase the exchange value of learning independently of its use value.’ (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 112).

Utilising the concepts of legitimate peripheral participation and communities of practice to examine DBA education leads one to question: what is the community of practice? Has publishing in high ranking journals become a parasitic practice?

### Learning to talk like a Doctor

Drawing attention to learning as a process and not an outcome shifts the analytical focus from the learner as an individual to learning as participation in the social world(s). From this viewpoint learning essentially involves becoming an ‘insider’ acquiring that community’s subjective viewpoint and learning to speak its language, (Brown and Duguid, 1991). However, as several commentators highlight (Contu & Willmott, 2003; Lawless, Sambrook, & Stewart, 2012) this can assume consensus and there is a danger of abstracting the ‘community’ of learners from the wider field of social relations.

This focus raises questions about the DBA and how members of this community ‘talk about’ and ‘talk within’ the practice. Lave and Wenger (1991: 109) provide examples of ‘talking about’: ‘e.g. stories and community lore’ and ‘talking within’: ‘e.g. exchanging information necessary to the progress of ongoing activities’. They highlight that ‘talking about’ includes ‘talking within’ and vice versa. However, both



forms of talk fulfil specific functions; 'taking about' supports communal forms of memory and reflection and signals membership, while 'talking within' enables engagement, focusing co-ordination and shifting attention. They argue that for newcomers 'the purpose is not to learn from talk ... it is to learn to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation.' (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 109). Extending this idea to academic writing the process of getting published (talk-within) remains largely hidden (ref). What we can access via data base searches is the finished product, the conference and journal paper, the talk-within.

### Learning to write like a Doctor

The expression 'publish or perish' appears to gain momentum as we get closer to assessment exercises. We are currently within a context where policies on research impact evaluation have grown in importance, especially since the 2008 financial crisis. This is exemplified by the UK Research Excellence Framework (REF) research agenda which results in heightened pressures to publish in high ranking journals. This 'REF-able' work takes many hours to produce and learning to talk-within this community many years to accomplish. This highlights the importance of identity construction as DBA students learn to become Doctors.

Lave and Wenger (1991: 53) highlight that learning cannot be adequately understood as the transmission and acquisition of information and skill but 'involves the construction of identities'. From this perspective people construct identities as they become part of a community. Barton and Tusting (2005) incorporate the broader social context and build on communities of practice theory by incorporating a model of language-in use, drawing attention to issues of power and conflict. This is developed by researchers who draw on academic literacies theory. For example, three aspects of identity in students' text are revealed: one, the 'autobiographical' self, the writers personal history; two, the 'discoursal' self, the way people represent themselves; and three, the 'authorial' self, the way in which people own their ideas. (Clark & Ivanič, 1997). This highlights that writers negotiate an identity from a range of possibilities for 'self-hood'. However, Paxton (2003) cautions that writers are not in full control in the 'choice' of an identity. She argues that the process of acquiring a new discourse and identity is a subconscious process and is socially constrained as students make sense within a particular epistemology.

This draws attention to the power relationships inherent within the process of identity construction. Identity work is the process of continuous efforts to form, repair, maintain or revise perceptions of self in relation to others. This highlights that continual reworking of identity arises because individuals participate in not one, but multiple communities and networks of practice. Each will have different norms of belonging and a different repertoire of 'typical' identities. Individuals bring to these communities their early-socialized 'dispositions' to act in similar ways across different contexts and communities. However, the potential for identity conflict is significant as individuals move between different communities and they may still seek to present

particular identities to outsiders regulated by their discourses within the communities. This conflict is heightened when written work becomes published. In summary, community of practice and academic literacies theory challenges the model of academic publishing which focuses on achieving cognitive skills which can easily be transferred from one context to another. In particular, the notion of talk- within and talk-about is fruitful, learning to talk and write while becoming a Doctor.

## **Conclusion**

This paper re-focuses attention on the conceptual richness within communities of practice and academic literacies theory. We argue that DBA research has many advantages, in particular the opportunity to make an impact within an organisational setting and the opportunity to develop academic – practitioner relationships. This professional education brings to the fore debates regarding the rigour and relevance of research; debates which are at the heart of HRD. Indeed, Higher Education (HE) has long been regarded as a site of HRD practice, and research within this context has contributed to our community, for example: (Holden, Griggs, Sambrook, & Stewart, 2010; Lawless, 2008).

Findings from this study will influence the agenda for the further growth of British DBA programmes and other professional doctorates. Indeed, this project seeks to influence the design of doctoral programmes, to ensure an ongoing understanding and debate regarding the relational impact of management education on management practice, relating to professional doctorates in UK business schools. In presenting this paper it is our intention to connect with those who are equally passionate about the hidden impact of DBA education and those who want to support the DBA community to publish, and refuse to perish!

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